

# INTERIM

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*The cover of this issue of Interim is by*

LT. ZEARL E. LINDSAY

## *Editors*

A. WILBER STEVENS

ELIZABETH DEWEY STEVENS

## *Editor's Note*

With this issue INTERIM ends its first year of publication. For the benefit of those who are doubtful, the editors wish to state at this time that INTERIM is eagerly looking forward to its second year. In fact INTERIM hastens to look forward to its tenth.

In its first three issues this magazine has distributed 4500 copies. Our subscription list is gratifying, and we trust, lasting. We can claim subscribers and contributors abroad as well as at home. And what is most interesting to us we can claim the most pointed ensemble of readers imaginable. INTERIM has always been irked by the noncommittal opinion. And INTERIM has welcomed continuously the forthright opposition or the enthusiastic welcome. We have received such reactions from both sides of the fence. Our approach being an eager one, we feel that we have been strengthened by the injuries and sustained by the compliments. The point we wish to stress is that we are still extant, that we have one of the most lively followings of any literary magazine in print, and that we intend to keep growing, for we believe with all our hearts that art is not a static thing.

However, we may choose to interpret brotherhood, we all realize that the question of its existence is closer to us than ever before. All over the world men are crawling out of holes and looking about them. About them and around them values are being superimposed for these men to observe and to revere. Through this mist of shadow-minded activity many men can see, and see all too clearly, that a canopy of form is being spread over that which does not possess a full amount of substance. These men can realize that out of such an undefined and pseudo-heroic set of values the individual man must emerge with his own particular quality of mind and his own selflessness of spirit.

It is for the artist of our time to lead the way, and shun the shoulders of the road which are dark and false. Honesty of spirit is not a legislative trait. All men must know that in the end we must sing, or we shall surely die.

A. W. S.

## RAY B. WEST, JR.—The Blue Spring

He stood for a moment looking down over the tops of the willows into the cool blue of the water. He could see the silver shadows of the sunfish darting like arrows through the shallows near the bank. He arced a bright, wild-rose berry into the pool, saw one of the fish streak toward it, hold it for a moment in his mouth, and then spit it out again. The berry descended slowly as the fish slipped quietly into deep water. The ripples faded, and the surface became smooth and unbroken as glass.

He walked back and surveyed the willow cave. That was what he had named it during the beet-thinning season when he had lain in its shade at noon and during the rest periods. He had lain there during midsummer too, when he had come down to help his uncle get in the hay. He had been too young to use a fork—that is, regularly to pitch the hay—but he had tromped and so had learned to build a load, forming it gradually away from the top of the rack like a pyramid.

There was a little fear mixed with the pleasure he felt now in surveying the cave. The place was nothing but a niche his uncle had cut into the rows of willows in such a way that the bowed stalks formed an umbrella from the sun. There were still scraps of waxed paper scattered about the edges, and when he bent over to pick them up, he saw that there were even a few hardened scraps of breadcrumb that the birds had missed.

When he had cleaned up, he walked out into the alfalfa patch and pulled several armfuls. He spread them evenly over the hardpacked dirt until the whole space was covered. Then he lay down and tested it. The stalks were soft and leafy—even though the hay was in its third crop—and he sniffed the bitter fragrance of the juices as his body pressed them. His limbs were like water as he imagined Jamie with him. He remembered what Harry and Stew Pendleton had told him.

"She likes you, Kit. You could do it easy. Just ask her to go bike riding. I done it with Megs Brodie."

He thought of the things Harry had told him about Megs, and he tasted the thought of it, a bitter pleasure, full of the knowledge of what his father and mother would say if they knew. What his uncle would say, or his teacher. He was tempted to give up, but the idea had taken hold of him, and he knew he couldn't. He'd already asked her to go riding with him on Saturday, and she had said she would. She would have her mother fix lunch for them, she had said, and he had told her, almost afraid to look her in the face, that he would call by at ten-thirty.

Mrs. Merriwether came to the door when he jangled the bell on his handlebars.

"Jamie's not quite ready yet," she said, standing in the door and wiping her hands on her apron. "Won't you come in?"



Kit said, no, he'd wait there. Mrs. Merriwether looked at him closely, and he was afraid for a moment he had spoiled everything. He leaned his bike against the fence and stepped inside the picket gate.

"I'll sit here," he said.

There was just a dirt path leading from the gate to Jamie's front door, and it had a little irrigation ditch running down the side of it and around to the vegetable garden. He sat with his feet in the dry ditch and poked between his knees at a pile of dry mud that had been used for a dam.

"Looks like a hot day," Mrs. Merriwether commented. "I hope Jamie don't get burnt."

He pretended to look at the sky. It was hot probably the last hot day of the summer. He didn't care about Jamie's being late. He had worried about getting there too early, before his uncle had left to do the Saturday shopping.

"She burns awful easy."

Kit looked at her, hoping to reassure her, but no sensible words would come. The concern in her voice made him wonder if Harry had been right about Jamie. If her mother worried so much about her—

"You're Doctor Lowes' boy, up at the college, ain't you?" Mrs. Merriwether asked.

He acknowledged that he was. He saw that it would make it all right—Jamie's going bike riding with him.

"You'll be careful. See that she don't do nothing foolish?"

"Yes, ma'am," he managed to say.

She smiled at him then and went away. In a moment Jamie came out.

"Hello," she said.

She was wearing a white dress with a wide-ribbon sash about the waist. She had a straw hat hung over her arm.

"Now, Jamie. Don't you forget. Keep that hat on."

Mrs. Merriwether's voice came from the dark interior of the house. Jamie smiled at Kit.

"All right, Ma. I won't."

She had dark curls that hung to her shoulders, and that was one reason she had become so popular with the boys since coming to town. This was her first year. Kit didn't know what her father did, but he was a carpenter or painter or something like that. Some of the girls didn't like her, because they said her father was a working man.

"I'll get my bike."

She disappeared around the side of the house, the big bow on the back of her dress bouncing as she ran. She came back in a minute pushing a new bike, a girl's model, one which Kit could see was much more expensive than his own. It seemed strange that she should have such a good bike.

"Where are we going?" she asked when they were ready to start.

"I'll show you. It's a keen place," he said, throwing his leg over his seat almost as though he were mounting a horse. "You follow. I'll show you."

She was carrying the lunch in a wire basket on her handlebars. He felt that he should have strapped it on his rear-mudguard carrier but she had said nothing about it, and he didn't know how to offer without seeming sissy. He slowed down until she was almost up to him, and then he speeded up again, knowing she would cry after him.

"Please, Kit! Wait for me! I can't go so fast."

It made him feel good, knowing he could ride faster than she could. He turned around and pulled a face at her, and she pretended to be angry. He could tell by her eyes that she wasn't. One thing though. He didn't want anyone else to see them. It wasn't quite the way he had imagined it, Jamie in the clean white dress, and new bike. He remembered when Harry had told him about taking Megs Brodie, she had worn overalls and had ridden on his bar.

There was something wrong about the way he was doing it, Kit thought. Too much like going on a Sunday picnic up the canyon with his family. More than that—it was almost like going to a birthday party at one of the girls' houses. He didn't have on his best clothes, but Jamie did, and that wasn't the way he had imagined it.

"Where we going? Please tell me," Jamie said again when they turned west toward the fields.

Her hair was blown out now, and the had had come off and was trailing by the ribbon around her throat. Kit thought again how she was the best looking girl in their grade at school. He knew Harry would like to be him, even if he wouldn't admit it. He thought maybe Jamie wouldn't even go with Harry, because lots of the girls wouldn't. Only a certain kind of girls liked him, and Kit hadn't decided yet whether Jamie was that kind or not.

"How would you like to see them make bricks?" he asked.

He was sorry at once. He had decided not to go by way of the brick-yard, because that was the way his uncle would be coming back from the fields.

"Maybe we can come back that way," he told her.

"Where are we going?"

He told her finally: the Blue Spring. The name didn't mean anything to her.

"It's a keen place. You'll see. The spring's so deep, no one ever touched bottom. A man dropped a plow in once, and he got the longest rope he could find. He put a hook on it and tried to find the plow, but he never could get a long enough rope to touch the bottom."

He was relieved when they got to the top of the lane and he couldn't see his uncle on it. The road was clear all the way to the cut-off. Across the valley, he could see the 11:45 just coming through the narrows, and he slowed down and pointed it out to her.

"Look!" he said. "There's the 11:45. See it?"



The train wound like a black snake over the foothills. He knew it was almost 11 o'clock because the train had to go all around the valley before it arrived in the station at 11:45. He told her how when they were thinning beets they would watch for it, and when it pulled into the station they would know it was only fifteen minutes to lunch time.

Jamie was interested, and she had him tell her what it was like working on his uncle's farm in the summer time. When he opened the barbed wire gate at the head of the beet-patch, they pushed their bikes a little way out into the field and he showed her the beets, explaining that they would be ready for topping soon. They lay the bikes in the tall grass along the irrigation ditch, and he offered to carry the basket. He showed her the place where they had fed a frog to a water-snake. He told her how they had cut the snake open and the frog had jumped out.

"Just as lively as you please," he said. "A little damp, that's all."

"How could you?" she asked.

That made him feel strong and grown-up again. "It was nothing," he replied, forgetting how his stomach had almost turned when they had first cut the snake in two with their beet-hoes. "Course," he told, "we don't kill water-snakes. They're good. But frogs are valuable too. They eat insects. It was just an experiment," he told her.

He set the basket down in the shade of the willows. His heart beat faster when he saw that no one had molested the green covering. The alfalfa leaves were wilted now, but otherwise the cave was just as he had left it. Jamie threw her straw hat down beside the lunch, and they crossed to where he could show her the spring. He was afraid she might have noticed something strange about the cave, but she didn't seem to. He wished he had the nerve to hold her hand. That would help, he thought. When she saw the spring she gasped.

"Oh!" she said. "It is blue, isn't it?"

He laughed and tried to pretend that it was nothing. But he couldn't help noticing that it was as blue today as he had ever seen it. It was bluer even than the color of the water his mother used to rinse clothes in when she washed, deeper and more natural, and two small white clouds were mirrored in the center of it.

He told her how cold the water was, how they filled their jugs from it when they worked in the hay. It was just like mountain water.

"But I go swimming in it," he boasted. "I've swum all the way across it."

"Have you?" she said. "It must be fun. Oh, don't you wish we had bathing suits with us?"

He must have looked at her kind of funny, because she blushed and turned away. Then she changed the subject.

"I want to go down and feel it," she said.

He took hold of her hand then, because he had to help her down the narrow path. There were only two places to get to the water; that is, unless you went further down and waded up the slough. He told her that. You went down and waded up the slough when you went swimming, he told her, because the water in the slough was warmer. That way the cold water came upon you gradually. Sometimes they took gigs. She didn't know what a gig was, so he told her it was like a small pitchfork, only it had barbs on the end like fishhooks. There were carp and suckers in the slough and you could spear them. His uncle had planted trout in the spring once, but the carp all came up and ate the trout. He told about the time they had planted the trout. His uncle put dynamite in the spring and blew it up. Some of the fish, he said, were blown clear out into the fields. The rest of them just came floating to the surface. His uncle put a screen in then, and planted the trout, but the screen broke before the trout had grown big enough to get away from the carp that came up from the slough.

He felt a particular pride in telling about the Blue Spring, though he was simply reflecting his uncle's pride. His uncle wouldn't let anyone come near it unless they promised not to throw trash into it. He kept the bushes trimmed as though they were growing in his front yard in town. Being here alone with Jamie, Kit felt almost as though the spring belonged to him instead of to his uncle. He could almost imagine it.

Jamie felt the water and said it didn't feel as cold as he had said it was.

"Say!" he said. "You just want to try going swimming in it."

She laughed at him this time. He could feel the red flowing up his neck until his ears burned.

"Why," she said, squealing with delight. "You're blushing."

He looked away from her, glad that Harry and Stew couldn't see him now. What would they say if they knew Jamie had made him blush. Then he saw that she was taking off her shoes and stockings.

"I just want to put my feet in and see how cold it is," she said.

He took his own shoes off too. He kicked about in the water, feeling the chill creep into his ankles. In a moment Jamie put one toe cautiously over the surface. He reached with his foot and pushed it under water.

"Don't!" she cried.

But she didn't try to pull it out again. He felt his excitement mount at the feel of her bare flesh against his feet. He kicked again, running the sole of his foot down her leg. She pulled her feet onto the bank and tucked them under her, and he caught a quick glimpse of her underthings—a pink petticoat and white bloomers. He pulled his feet from the water and stood up.

"Let's go," he said. "I got another place I want to show you."

He led her back up the bank to the cave.

"This is where we eat lunch," he said. "When we work, I mean."



He hadn't meant to suggest that they eat now. He wasn't hungry, and besides she had brought the lunch so it was her place to say that. He had carried her shoes back with his own, and he lay them at the edge of the willows.

"Isn't this a nice place?" he asked.

She didn't reply, and this surprised him. But she did come into the cave and sit down beside him. He glanced at her, and she was chewing a grass stalk. Her forehead was puckered thoughtfully.

"You know," he said, attempting to speak lightly. "You know what the hired man told me?"

She shook her head, but she still didn't look at him. He wondered, now he had gone so far, just how to continue.

"He said — he said he played poker once. You know what poker is?"

She nodded.

"He said he played once where —" He seemed almost choked for breath now. It was like the time he went in Woolworth's to swipe a watch-fob when Harry bet him he didn't dare. "— where each time anybody lost they took off some of their clothes."

He looked at her, wondering what she would say, but she said nothing.

"Shall we play that?" he asked. "Course we can't play poker, but something like it?"

"I don't care."

Her voice was low and sounded a little frightened. He felt suddenly very happy, the way he had when he came out of the store with the watch-fob and Harry and Stew were waiting for him. His legs and arms were weak and trembling.

"Look!" he said, but she didn't look. "I'll pick up these two little rocks. See? You guess how many I got in my hands—either one or two. If you guess right—then I got to. If you don't— That all right? Well—how many I got?"

She waited so long he was afraid she wasn't going to say. He had to repeat it.

"How many?"

"Two," she said.

"Two," he repeated, confused. "That's right."

He hadn't thought about what would happen if he lost. He had made up the game on the spur of the moment. He debated what to take off, then decided on his shirt.

"How many this time?"

"One," she said.

He had known she would do that, and he had saved two, the same as before.

"It's your turn," he told her.



She hesitated, then reached slowly around her back and loosened her bow. The dress had a wide neck, and she just pulled it over her head. He was disappointed. She didn't look any different except for her bare arms. The petticoat was just like a dress.

The next time he lost again, and there was nothing he could do except take off his trousers. That left only his underwear and he would be stark naked. He wondered how many things she had left. Two that he knew of. She lost the next time, and he was afraid for a minute that she was going to back out.

"Turn your head," she said finally, so low he could scarcely hear.

He had already turned partly away from her, because he was ashamed of how he looked in his underwear. He squirmed a little more, but he could still see from the corners of his eyes. She wore nothing below the petticoat but her bloomers. It took him longer to decide now how many stones to keep. He didn't want to be the first. He thought how easy it would be to cheat. She never looked at the stones when he told her. He decided to try two again.

"How many?" he asked.

"One," she said.

She had lost—fair and square. She didn't say anything and she didn't move. He wasn't even looking at her now, but he could remember her body. The thing that struck him was its whiteness. He wonder if all girls had skin that white. Aside from that her body didn't look any different than his. The skin was softer maybe, but her chest was flat and hard. He wondered if Harry had been lying when he had told him about Megs Brodie. He bet Megs didn't have skin as white as Jamie.

He turned his head a little and saw that she had not yet moved. He wondered what he would do if she should take the bloomers off. He knew that she would if he asked her. She was kneeling, her head turned away from him as though she were simply staring out over the fields, and her dark black curls fell over her white shoulders. She reminded him of a picture he'd seen somewhere, he couldn't remember where, but it might have been in church. Suddenly he knew he didn't want to see any more of her body. He didn't feel the way he had before and he knew she didn't want to go on with it either. She would if he told her to, but she didn't want to.

He threw the rocks out into the alfalfa patch.

"Let's not play any more," he said.

She looked at him then, and it was he who turned away. When he looked back in a moment she was still staring at him, and there was a peculiar look in her face that he had never seen before. She put her hands to her face, and he was afraid she was going to cry. He didn't know what to do, so he began suddenly to get back into his clothes. He wished he had never suggested the game. They were really having a good time until he had suggested taking their things off. He wished now that she would be the way she had been when he rubbed his feet against her legs down by the spring.

She didn't cry, and he saw in a moment that she had begun to dress. When he had got his shirt on, he stood up and walked away from the cave to button it. Then he walked back. She was just tying her bow and putting her hat back on when he got there.

"Let's not stay here," he said. "Let's go some place else."

She didn't reply for a moment. Then she looked up at him.

"Kit?"

"Yeh?"

"It's a lovely place, really it is."

"Oh — "

He kicked his toe into the dirt, loosening a clod that sprayed out from his shoe.

"Kit?"

He looked at her again. He wished she wouldn't talk. He had liked it better the other way.

"Kit, are we engaged now? Does that make us engaged?"

He hadn't thought of that. He wondered if it did. The idea pleased him in a way, but he wondered what Harry would say.

"Ye-ah, maybe," he said slowly.

She picked up the lunch and scrambled out from beneath the bushes.

"Where is it you want to go, Kit?"

"Oh, I don't know," he said. "I just thought maybe we could go up to the brickyard and watch them make bricks."

He couldn't tell whether she really wanted to or not. She seemed to, though. She set out ahead of him running, even carrying the lunch basket.

"Come on," she called. "I'll race you to the bikes."

He pretended to try to catch her, but he really didn't. Somehow he got to wondering about the Blue Spring, if it was really so deep no one had ever been able to find the bottom. When he was grown up, he thought, he would come out here sometime with all the rope they had in all the stores in town. He would tie a big weight on it, and he would really see if he couldn't find the bottom of it then.

When he caught up with her and they were picking up their bikes he told her about it. She seemed pleased and excited at the idea.

"You do that, Kit," she told him. "I'll bet you could do it too. I'll bet you could really find the bottom."



*J. C. CREWS—Bale Thaw*

Through the chill twilight dusk  
the moon, silver as spun aluminum,  
reddens and the outline grows dim

and if this night  
should be a night of destiny

I shake my fists  
knowing the cheeks of my love grow pale  
even as the moon reddens  
and curse  
knowing the rise of the night-wind  
strikes breath  
from the lungs of my love

and if this night  
should be a night of destiny

The crack of the thaw I know  
draws warmth from the heart of my love.  
Is it wonder that I stare  
through the arc of the moon,  
wonder that I wave clenched fists  
and roar like a wounded stag?

and this night  
is a night of destiny

A wounded stag I am  
and mateless, and alone  
in the pale cheeks, in the quiet breast  
in the cold pulse. . .

## HARVEY MANNING—The Rational Mouse

"Goodbye," said the sire of the Rational Mouse. "Stay close to mama."

"Where are you going, papa?" asked the Rational Mouse.

"I am going to get some cheese, because cheese is very nourishing," replied Father.

The Rational Mouse, his older brother, and his mother awaited their provider's return with cheese but he did not return with cheese; he did not return at all. Presently Mother began to fret and went in search of Father, with the Rational Mouse and Older Brother flitting along behind. It was the Rational Mouse's first excursion into the world, and he was very humble.

In a dark corner of the kitchen they found Father, his teeth sunk in a piece of cheese, his neck and shoulders crushed in the steel arms of a trap.

"That's Life," said Mother stoically.

"That's Life?" repeated the Rational Mouse with wonder.

"Yes, son, that's Life," said Mother.

Mother commenced to explore the kitchen for food, since the hunger of the survivors remained alive though Father did not. Finding nothing on the floor, she prepared to spring up onto the pantry shelf, where a slice of bread lay exposed.

"Where are you going, Mother?" asked the Rational Mouse.

"I am going to get some bread, because bread is very nourishing," answered Mother.

"Mother, arriving at the slice of bread, observed that there was plenty, so before leaping to her waiting children with the food she indulged in a small snack.

As she was about to portion the food to the two hungry mice, her eyes began to bulge and her whiskers to twitch.

"Poison," she gasped, and rolled over dead.

"That's Life," said Older Brother sadly.

"That's Life?" repeated the Rational Mouse with wonder.

"Yes, that's Life," said Older Brother.

The two orphans were now very hungry. Older Brother searched the kitchen eagerly. There was nothing. Through a door, however, was a din-



ing room and a table with a fruit bowl on it. Older Brother scampered joyfully toward this windfall.

"Where are you going?" asked the Rational Mouse.

"I am going to get some fruit, because fruit is very nourishing," replied Older Brother.

But Older Brother got no closer than the door of the dining room before a dark form from the shadows pounced upon him. Older Brother shrieked once and was gobbled up by the Cat.

"That's Life," said the Cat, looking critically at the Rational Mouse's fat haunches and licking his great chops.

"That's Life?" repeated the Rational Mouse with wonder.

"Yes," said the Cat slowly, a bland smile in his yellow eyes, "that's Life."

The Cat's leap missed by so little that the Rational Mouse was slashed on the tail. Panic-stricken, he circled the kitchen wildly several times before collecting himself enough to dart into his family's hole. It took many minutes for his little heart to slow enough so he could think clearly.

"Goodness," pondered the Rational Mouse. "So that's Life. Father sought cheese, because cheese is nourishing, and *he* died. Mother sought bread, because bread is nourishing, and *she* died. Older Brother sought fruit, because fruit is nourishing, and *he* died. It seems quite clear that seeking the Nourishing is a very perilous business, for if one seek the Nourishing one gets killed. I am lucky to have discovered the Great Truth of Life in time. Obviously, if I am to live, I must not seek the Nourishing."

The Rational Mouse lay quietly in his hole, thinking these thoughts over and over, convinced more deeply each time of the truth of his observations.

"I absolutely must not seek the Nourishing," said the Rational Mouse, "because Life is such that if one seeks the Nourishing one gets crushed in a trap, or poisoned, or gobbled up by the Cat, or something equally deplorable."

The Rational Mouse, more and more delighted with his luck and his acute logic as time passed, sank by degrees into apathy, then stupor, then coma, and by and by starved to death.



## D. S. SAVAGE—

### The Status of Proletarian Poetry

To reopen, at this date, the well-worn question of "proletarian" writing may seem to some readers as ill-directed an activity as stabbing a dead fascist. The "proletarian" cry is inseverably associated in our minds with the defunct literary atmosphere of the 'thirties, a literary epoch which can surely never return. But I am by no means convinced that the issue is one which can be assumed to be safely dead and buried. Surface manifestations may wither and die, but the fundamental inner attitude to life and art which is capable of producing and proclaiming those manifestations is not so easily got rid of. The danger for the future is not that of a full-dress revival of the nineteen-thirties, but a more sinister and pervasive attempt to shackle art and the artist to some exterior obedience.

Is there is such a *genre* as "proletarian poetry"? Undoubtedly there is a kind of verse still being written and published which is presented as such. The curious feature of this verse is that it has no real connection with the life of the folk, and must be distinguished absolutely from popular ballads and songs which are genuinely nourished by, and in turn express, the life of the people. "Proletarian" poetry, or as it is sometimes called latterly—not without diplomatic modification—"social" poetry, is verse produced by quite sophisticated and not at all necessarily working-class individuals who however, by a faulty mental process are led in a peculiar way to confuse the values of art with the supposed requirements of social ends which have nothing whatever to do with art. Specimens of this kind of writing, and of the attitude which confused aesthetic with political values, were to be found in England just before the war in a periodical called *Poetry and the People*. The change in the political situation which put "revolutionary" politics out of court for the duration of the war, seems to have resulted in the decess of this publication, and so far it does not appear that the attitude to art which it expressed has found in England any consistent further outlet. The case is otherwise in America, where the shift of the left-wing parties from domestic to foreign enmities has resulted in the switch--over of "proletarian" poets to "anti-fascist" patriotic nationalism. Further change-overs may be expected in the future, and who is optimistic enough to predict that the English scene will be free of the underlying confusion which is at present revealed in a glaring form in certain manufactories of American poetry and criticism?

The following paragraph, which is taken from the "News Notes" of *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*, a reputable American poetry journal, for December 1942, will serve to indicate certain features of the (now nationalized) "proletarian" poetry and its intentions.

An anthology to be known as *War Poems of the United Nations* is being prepared by the League of American Writers. It will be edited by Joy Davidman and published by the Dial Press. An invitation is issued to



all American poets "to contribute such of their work as they believe useful to the war effort." It is the League's intention to include poetry representing all of the United Nations, "the countries which are invaded but not conquered—the Yugoslav guerrillas, the French underground," the peoples of Latin-America, and the Italian, German and Spanish anti-Fascist writers. "The only limitation in subject is that all poems must make their contribution to defeating the Axis—whether by attacking Fascism and its horrors, celebrating individual deeds of heroism, building morale and the spirit of resistance, crying for action, fighting racial discrimination, or by any of the hundred other methods of aiding the war effort . . .

The editorial staff of *Poetry* cannot, of course, be held responsible for any kind of attempted perversion of poetry which is reported in their news column. But an alarming indication of the absence of critical defense against this sort of illegitimate prostituting (for it is no less) of the poet's function, is provided in a more recent issue of *Poetry* (for August 1944), by a certain Mr. E. S. Forgotson who is there reviewing a book called *Seven Poets in Search of an Answer*. The review in question may seem a disproportionately small peg upon which to hang even a moderately elaborate critical article, but the fact that such a piece of facing-both-ways, however intrinsically unimportant, can get itself printed in a respectable periodical in this decade cannot, apart from the significance of the volume of verse which occasioned it, be without meaning.

"All of the poetry in this symposium," writes Mr. Forgotson, "which includes Maxwell Bodenheim, Joy Davidman, Langston Hughes, Aaron Kramer Alfred Kreymborg, Martha Millet and Norman Rosten, has as its basic attitude anger against fascism and fascistic behaviour." "Proletarian poetry," he continues, "is the voice of one who is angry, who counter-attacks, and who seeks to arouse and direct the counter-attack of others. Mr. Shaemas O'Sheel, who introduces the *Seven Poets*, praises Maxwell Bodenheim because 'his verse crashes forward with the tread of an angry man,' and he calls for a poetry 'that will set more feet marching against fascism, upset the plots of traitors and force the timid hands of statesmen; . . . books of high poetry; ballads celebrating our heroes and our cause; doggerel to take the hide off Hitlerites.'" Such is the outlook of the "proletarian" or "social" poet: the question is, what is the status of this kind of verse as compared with that which is "non-proletarian" or "non-social"?

It is reasonable to ask this question, for it appears that Mr. Forgotson, in his review, has some difficulty over it. It appears from his remarks that he is aware of certain unfriendly critics who do not like poetry to be "proletarian". "These critics have for a long time conveyed to us at least the impression that they found such poetry not very satisfying. They compared it with the work of other poets of our time and past times, with unhappy results for the proletarians, and in some instances hinted that the general condition of culture would be improved if the proletarian poets kept their inkwells shut." Mr. Forgotson admits, nevertheless, that "proletarian" poetry tends to be "thin" and "shallow", and this he attributes to its connec-

tion with its determining undercurrent of anger. ". . . It may be," he concurs, "that great anger, though just, operates toward the simplification, even towards the distortion of experience." Nevertheless, "In our time, when evil political pressures are so heavy and immediate, and so dangerous, a 'narrow' poetry of this kind has an understandable origin. It is the poetry of the imperilled, whose views may be narrow and simple out of the necessary intensity of their emotions. It is also poetry *for* the imperilled, and valuable for the same reason: it may operate to focus the attention of its audience undividedly on what must be destroyed, without any emotional slackening through full analysis, which, however true and profound, may at a crucial stage be impractical in terms of action." The result of Mr. Forgotson's deliberations is the conclusion that two separate *kinds* of poetry, proletarian and non-proletarian, exist, but that there is no reason why they should not lie down peaceably together. "I see no reason why we must make an either-or choice; I doubt that there is any inevitable dilemma between social poetry and other poetry, although some critics have a motive which will not let them rest easy until they have constructed one. We do not scorn an apple because it is not a grape: this attitude will serve to orchestrate the virtues of all kinds of poetry if one can acquire it. From different minds at a given time, or from the same minds at different times, we will have many sorts and conditions of literature. We need not admire it all helter-skelter to hold that there are many ways of skinning a cat and many cats to skin."

It is perhaps because I am to be numbered among the disapproving critics viewed by Mr. Forgotson with a certain amount of distaste that I find not only the kind of verse which he so accommodatingly makes room for, but the kind of critical, or rather non-critical attitude which he advocates, disturbing. What I propose to do here, then, is briefly to investigate the assumptions which underly such an attitude towards "proletarian", and other, poetry.

To begin with, it is necessary to ask, can there conceivably be such a branch of poetry existing in a category quite separate from that of poetry in general? It is true that we call some poems, because of the peculiar limitations of their fields of reference, "nature" poems, or "religious" poems, "love" poems or "war" poems. But in none of these cases do we completely separate all such poems from the common body of poetry and refuse to apply to them the standards which we apply to every other branch. Certainly, inasmuch as the adjective "proletarian" is restricted to the function of describing the subject-matter or field of reference of any given poem, we can admit the equal validity of "proletarian" poetry with that of any other such kinds—"nature" poetry, "war" poetry, "love" poetry or what you will—and can proceed to apply to it the identical aesthetic tests which we apply to them. Judged by these standards, a "proletarian" poem is either a good poem, *qua* poem, or it is a bad one. And there the matter ends. It is evident, however, that something quite other than this is implicitly claimed for "proletarian" poetry, something which has very little at all to do with aesthetics.

Mr. Forgotson defines proletarian poetry as poetry which is motivated by anger. No doubt it is so motivated, but it has further characteristics



which are more revealing of its true nature and significance. Its origin is rather less important than its *intention*. It is poetry with a purpose, actually, *functional* verse. It will be noted that, according to Mr. Forgotson's account, Mr. Shaemas O'Sheel, who introduces the *Seven Poets*, does not call for more genuine poems that will be more complete, satisfying and pleasurable in themselves. That is quite irrelevant to his requirements. He calls, not for a poetry which will *be* something, i.e., poetry but for a poetry which will *do* something: namely, "set more feet marching against fascism, upset the plots of traitors and force the timid hands of statesmen." The question that immediately arises is, why should *poetry* be required to do these things? And indeed it would seem logical that if literary individuals can set more feet marching—since that is the intention—by other than literary means, they would be better employed on those means. Would these "proletarian" poets and their sponsors agree with that? Probably they would: indeed, the conclusion is hardly avoidable. But if that is so, does it not follow also that if that desirable end can be the more efficiently attained by the writing of *bad* verse, then bad verse is the kind of verse which should be written? The only escape from this conclusion is to pronounce that such a standard of good and bad is inapplicable: that good verse is that which sets the most feet marching, and bad verse that which fails to do so. A position that renders the critic's position comically superfluous.

It is clear to me, and it surely should be clear to anybody who professes any concern with the dignity of poetry, that no "kind" of poetry can be recognized which is not subject to criticism by aesthetic standards. If such writing claims to be poetry, then it must be judged as poetry. This attitude would naturally reveal most "proletarian" poetry to be beneath contempt; thin, tedious stuff, if not, unfortunately, always short, then usually nasty and brutish. If it is *not* presented as poetry, but as advertisement or propaganda, then we know at once where we are. We then have, not, on the one hand, "social" poetry and on the other, poetry in general, but simply poetry and non-poetry. And that is, actually, the position: at any rate with respect to the kind of writing presented in the volume reviewed by Mr. Forgotson, if this, his only example is, as I have little doubt it is, a representative specimen:

*but kill the thieves;  
pile up the bodies of the murderers;  
beat no retreat from the interminable battlefield;  
suffer the spitting and the leather belts, but live;  
wash your hands in pain, but live, but live.\**

The false catholicity of the attitude of this particular American reviewer really disguises a cowardly reluctance to make firm critical discriminations.

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\*The implications for morality of such effusions can't be gone into here, but they undoubtedly have some relationship with the general "proletarian" theory of poetry's function.

There is no limit to which such a toleration can be stretched. How, for example, is such a reviewer, if he fails to apply to verse of that type the standards which he normally expects to apply to non-functional poetry, to make critical comparisons between one book of "proletarian" or "anti-fascist" verse and another? Not to be able to make such a comparison puts him in the strictly useless position of being obliged to accept indiscriminately everything that is presented to him bearing a certain political label. To reverse the situation: if a critical evaluation is permitted to be made as between one such book of "proletarian" verse and another, it follows that the same method of evaluation must be applied as between a volume of "proletarian" verse and a volume of mere poetry. It is very significant that in performing his balancing feat of sitting on the fence between the two supposed *genres* of poetry, this reviewer is so preoccupied with defining his tolerant attitude to both "kinds" of poetry that he quite forgets to deliver any critical verdict on the particular book in question, *Seven Poets in Search of an Answer*, and at the end of his review the reader still doesn't know whether, in his opinion, the book is worth reading or not.

All this is much like cracking walnuts with a hydraulic hammer: a wasteful and ridiculous occupation. So-called "proletarian poetry", it is obvious, is merely propaganda verse, having nothing essential in common with poetry. For it is of the essence of genuine poetry that it is *not* functional: its aim is not to *do* but to *be*. Functional verse is disintegral, it can never have inward, organic form, because it points always to some end which is quite exterior to its own structure. Yet it is precisely the quality of integrality, its state of being a true entity, with its own centre of gravity, which distinguishes any true work of art from the false. And a poem which does not itself achieve this kind of organic wholeness, internal equilibrium, can only be the product of a writer who has not himself managed to organize his perceptions emotions and ideas into an integral pattern. That is to say, a non-poem is the product of a non-poet. The so-called "proletarian" or anti-fascist writers are pseudo-poets who, unable to accomplish the integral gestures of poetry, yet unwilling to surrender the prestige of the poetic mantle, project their internal disorder on to their unfortunate readers. Because their poetry will not justify itself, it has to be justified by being referred to something completely external which has nothing whatever to do with art or the values of art. But no such justification is possible.

This functional view of poetry is one which would debase it to the level at which it becomes a ephemeral attachment to certain transient social situations. There is a fine unconscious irony in Mr. Forgetson's statement that—"What was formerly proletarian poetry has become anti-fascist poetry, just as what was formerly overt revolutionary Marxism has become the anti-fascism of the alliance of classes and of national liberation." When the political situation changes, the functional, propaganda verse that has been written to accord with a previous social situation, becomes useless; never having had worth as poetry, it now loses worth even as propaganda: the natural end of all advertisement. The irony is maintained when Mr. Forgetson goes on to say, at the conclusion of his review—"Poetry of this sort, then, has, in the period of its natural appearance, a genuine social function and value

—it may even be called indispensable for a total war.” It would be difficult to find a more reprehensible example of clerical treason than that blithe statement. If such “poetry” is “indispensable for a total war”, that is, for a totalitarian society at war, we may be sure that it will be no less “indispensable” for a totalitarian society when it is not at war. Such verse is in fact totalitarian verse—it is the functional art of the totalitarian State, and its significance can be understood only in the light of the present universal trend towards totalitarianism. The cry for “ballads celebrating our heroes and our cause; doggerel to take the hide off Hitlerites” happens to come from an enthusiastic American Marxist turned chauvinist. It might equally well, with slight alterations, have come from a German or Russian, Hitlerite or Stalinite, literary bureaucrat.

To conclude, I would like to establish a connection on the one hand between this disintegral “social” poetry (which, as I have said, is verse which has its end exterior to its own structure, and which results from an illegitimate confusion between art and “politics” or “action”) and a view of life which destroys the integrality of the individual person and makes him subsidiary to the social or historical processes; and on the other hand, between true, integral *personal* poetry, which is centered structurally within itself, and the view of life which gives absolute significance to the individual personality and relates history and politics to that centre.

Whatever the particular outward form assumed by totalitarianism, its inward nature is invariable: it is in essence a denial and destruction of the integrity and worth of the individual personality. To carry this denial into the realm of art is necessarily to destroy likewise the integrality of the art-products of that personality. An equivocal attitude on this issue is not possible for the serious and responsible critic. When the totalitarian philosophy of being creeps into poetic theory and practice, his clear duty is to show it the door, not at all for political, but for strictly *aesthetic* reasons.





## *Three Poems by—JAMES FRANKLIN LEWIS*

### *Hymn to Home*

*Warm pupil of the world's insane eye  
Drawing by elastic radii all the farflung  
Cite and variety of imperfect heaven,  
From this our center and tried oasis,  
From this our dark window, inner circle,  
Island, seed, fertile nursery,  
From here, with the fleet fluid of sight,  
We water the pomp and parch of immensity,  
Safe between lintel and sill.*

*Focus of all the stars, modest mainspring  
Of the world-galactic watch, point-magnet  
For the drawing here of the light of all age and place  
Filtered and epitomized to the world-collection,  
Spot of gravitation, enterprising spark,  
Here at your pole, we know how meaningless direction is  
When all the escapes, all lanes and lures of land,  
Are but the loss of self and blood and need.*

*Lighthouse reared to our daring posterity,  
Safe lamp for these moths to circle and delight in  
When the search for a home in a homeless America  
Shall further have dimmed the match of your tradition,  
Candle burrowing the violet ultra-darkness then,  
Times when the fear and dread and torture and torment  
Of intolerable drudgery and unwanted labor  
Shall have spent, and their nomad wagons broken,*

*They shall set their wandering watches again by your faith  
and point,  
They shall guide their jumpy needles by your nuclear lode,  
Something you will be to see, and see, remember,  
Shy sample of position, frame, portrait, power,  
Reference-point for maps.*

*Home is a library of unrivalled masterpiece,  
The common center of sensuous intellect,  
Shelter for the cell of my neat, level, personal shelves,  
Where I may please be seated,  
Where the news finally reaches,  
And where the sweet idea dwells.*

*House by the side of the sea,  
Mill by the great unending lake-commotion,  
Calm water-wheel indipped in the turbulent race,  
Fixed motion idling on the shore of that infinite flowage,  
The inexpensive absolute of opulent repose,  
Lost in a swirling world, not needing to be found,  
The one confirmed certainty,  
Spot of generation and duration,  
Nest-egg, sweetened mattress, worn chair,  
Oh where are you in the evening?  
Oh where are you when I limp to find you?  
Where are you down the dark sleet?*

*Can we have lost you?  
Oh, digressed again from half-rewarded labors,  
And our flesh plundered by ambitions not our own,  
Can we have lost our way to you?  
Oh, depressed from years of house-hunting  
Through the amazed mileage of some temporary city,  
Oh can we have lost our home?*

*Where the tears of life's mysterious tragedy  
Ate not unlike to a strange excess of happiness,  
And where the purple of the eye  
By seeing near sees far,  
Drawing by elastic radii the farflung  
Spot and variety of imperfect heaven  
Into perfect haven,  
From vast opinionable incompleteness  
Into small complete being,  
There, oh eternity shrunk to life's usable week,  
Are you, my beauty, faithful if I find you,  
Sole and wonderful supremacy,  
Face and focus of the earth.*

### *The Annual Poem*

*How often autumn, whose tripartite peace  
Of branches (Birth and Love and Death) deceased  
Its fair mass of shredded yellow downward  
Into dusky gossip—how often autumn  
Came like meditated rest upon  
The aged tree, only the aged tree  
Itself could tell; the blossomer abdicates  
Again his own creation, stripped black-clean,  
To clothe the unclothed rocks this season  
Again, with his miserable remnants  
Of preferred yellow, demoting passion  
Ribbonwise to blow off steam and dust;  
While that wild blasphemer, trinity himself,  
Hugs his annular hard rings to his heart.*



*The sun wore out the dew with looking at it,  
As I the season. Dendritic delapidation  
Of the bird lattice to a bare cage.  
Leaves demeaning submarine to brown.  
The advanced sage (I mean the old man)  
Amid the wind's interrupting thuds  
Of those three branches, feels among his veins  
The same deferred poison, in his sap  
Demeaning, wears out the dawn with looking for it,  
Wears out the clouds with eyes to ask the rain.*

*Tree is the same war-hardened ancient, back—  
Kept leaves like Christmas cards from year to year,  
Until the very bushelry of old letters stank,  
Stacked underfoot for fertilizer.— O man,  
How saving art thou of thy verse-paragraphs!  
O sage, how spicy thy decay!*

*These trophies from the dry tripartite peace,  
Treat them as though their minds were still alive  
(Fallen as now they are in their mockery  
Of democracy, all fallen); dead instruments  
In transit to experiment again  
(In faint ammonia under memory-meadows)—  
Remember now thy youth in the days of no  
Creator.— Time is the waiver.— Breath-tossed shadows.—*

By such Romantic sadness may account  
A though-surprise and spring, impermanence stilled  
By the year's day-star wrapped in utter clouds  
Of calm (gradation, graduation of light  
And the linked effects of sound). Birdless, be they.  
And each leaf downward draws a spiral path  
Less permanent than the leaves themselves had been.  
The crying season carries care on wing,  
Spirally to follow the bird-vacuum  
Horizontally with the wind. The wrecked log  
Lays its long trash across the path,  
To trip up Jack running around with a light-bulb  
Through the dim hollows. And the old man knows.  
The old man knows his cold tripartite tree,  
Whereunder to return his allocation.  
The sky goes down—and how many deaths again,  
And how many souls magmatic-underdrawn,  
Before these sombre clouds of aching soil  
Shall not return the season and tripartite  
Peace again; but only the lone stub, the stump,  
The rotting remnant-monument, shall rear,  
And winter stay, and nothing be the year?—:  
That, only time shall know. Time . . .

When autumn calls  
And the fires light  
And the fires come,  
When the hills fire;  
Then only the sun-filled leaf  
Shall, on the brown sheaf,  
Die;

*Then only love be born.  
In the cradle of rotting thorn,  
Hope be born;  
When autumn calls  
And the fires light  
And the fires come,  
On the night . . .*

## *Ascent of Storm King Mountain*

*For H. J. B. Craven*

*The broad bright Hudson hugged clearly  
To its one night-green castellated island  
Like a spherical arsenal of amassed trees.  
We could see it behind us when we turned  
To question whether it were best to climb  
Further up the slope. Magnificent blemish there,  
It was, placed with thought for center,  
Like a feeling of having slept. Often as we  
In laboring high against the rocking cradles  
Of disturbed stone      looked homesick backward  
Towards that island we had never set foot upon  
(But had only seen      in splendid rapture of distance  
As the green enchanted centerpiece of beauty)  
It confirmed our heads of vertigo, corroborated  
Veto for us, silently said no.*



*There braced with air or nothing . we returned  
On all fours of feet and hands, though,  
To snap the dusty skeletons and rotted bones  
Of starved ancestral trees false-bridging  
Stone to rolling stone, or in a sudden heel  
Of apoplectic seizure pitched our bodies  
At the slim poplar saplings standing  
Luckily around for live anchor; then gasping  
with excitement at our near escape from life,  
Had speedy access to that ritual calm sphere  
Of night-green battlement (settled for a dark gem  
Forever in waves and color-frivols of the broad  
Hudson) where our sight and breath rested.*

*I don't recall if we attained the crest  
Of Storm King mountain, or if we failed to,  
Why. I only remember that a river-center,  
Where I had never landed, where I never shall,  
Stood far and clearly visible to physical eye,  
As the home-focus to return to after casual raids  
And rock-rollings on the rattlesnake-infested heights  
Of mere adventure. New York State, and its trance  
Of stream, and its violet Catskills to the west,  
Were new then to me, as almost now forgotten,  
Foreign, as even that lone eye-center of island  
Seems to be when I look back on it from tumbling heights of time,  
Nothing but a happy knack of transfer  
Gaining color of haven and Avalon,  
Romantic port to put to (and the truer for its half-reality)  
When on the slope we pitch again at a sapling birch or poplar-thread,  
To hang us safe a moment, from destruction.*

**KENNETH HANSON—First Avenue, Seattle**

*Fish faces, bled white, bloated and washed ashore;  
negotiate the world from bar to bar,  
live in a thin ascetic whirl where  
street chrome coin home  
inhabit crazily the foreign gutter..*

*More than the sea drift separates the scum  
from ports where at the end of some  
adventure clothed in commonplace  
the fever ridden sailors come  
to dream of Singapore, then Samothrace.*

*The solemn sentinels of grace  
abounding wink and leer  
then offer forty-cent burlesque  
as certain antidote to fear.*

*Sound of glass waves breaking up and down.  
Along the street, the spindrift and alone  
attempt to make Eumenides in cacophone  
of pinball, false as no sea bell.  
Souls flounder in the treachery of town.*



## ALLIS McKAY—Dance Hall

The state highway repair man stopped to telephone, and the girl stopped drumming on the ranch house piano so he could hear the party at the other end. She said, "You've got to play, to keep in practice. I wish I had a job around here. A Saturday night job, even. I'll sound terrible when I hit town again."

"The local boys get the local jobs," the road man said.

"I know that," the girl in the slacks said, "that's only fair. We do that in San Francisco, too."

"Besides, they don't make much whoopee here. The amusement laws are pretty strict in this state."

"I could be arrested for what I think of the amusement laws in this state," the girl said. She spun around to the piano, and started "Bow Down to Washington" in rumba time.

"You do that pretty good." The road man lingered in the doorway, turning his cap in his hands. "Look, you might get a job at Telamuk Point—they average a new piano player every two or three weeks up there."

"Yeah? And what's the matter with Telamuk Point?"

"It's run by the Indians, for one thing."

"Good for the Indians. What do they do,—war-dance?"

"No, no. You don't want to get romantic ideas about the Indians here. They're just like anybody else, only fatter. And live on reservations. Reservations are Federal land; they don't have any state closing hour; and everybody goes there to dance after the other places close at midnight. The orchestra has to stay till the last dog is hung; and that's plenty late, and it's plenty far from Apple City. Nobody that can get a job playing in Apple City will work that spot if they can help it."

"I come from a burg where they stay up nights," the girl said. "I think I'll give it a whirl."

\* \* \*

Whenever they came down out of the mouth of the Little Coulee after nightfall, down the steep grade toward the lake with the electric-lighted village sunk in the hills at the end, she began to hum "O Little Town of Bethlehem." "There's no Bethlehem about that robbers' roost," the driver grumbled, changing gears. The lake was purple-black, invisible, except where a riding-light from a launch lay against the shore. It filled the bottom of the valley. The car came down from the hill and lurched left and right among the dark orchards. Sometimes it came close enough to the water to show little waves washing over the gravel in the light from the car.



The village at the foot of the lake was wide open for Saturday night. The state liquor dispensary was doing a rushing business. The parking lots were jammed. The old resort hotel, with lanterns along its creaking porch, was full of ranch families. Women in khakis and men in leather jackets and cords, and children and mutts and mice and fleas overran the tourist camps. There were two "nicer" cafés in town and they were both full, and the dime store and Rosenberg's and the chain grocerias and the filling stations were swarming with apple knockers stocking up for next week. The pavilion by the lake had a dance going full blast, and there were others at the lodge hall and in the back rooms of the cafés.

The orchestra bound for Telamuk Point drove through town, stopping for a hamburger and beer. It consisted of the girl from San Francisco and an unwilling drummer from Apple City with his fretful wife, and a still more unwilling saxophone player with a hangover, sore because he had been fired from Mac's Place in Apple City for being three days A. W. O. L.

"We're a bunch of punks to come up here," the saxophone player said. "Nobody but punks work this spot. And you're as punk as anybody, Frisco. What are you doing up here?"

"That's my business," the girl said. "Are you using Penny Serenade? O. K. How about Twelfth Street Rag? Good. You play a chorus and then break it a little, and I'll take it hot in the right hand then you can have it back on the third chorus."

"There was a good crowd back there at the pavilion," the drummer said.

"That was our crowd," the girl explained: "we'll get it when the pavilion closes. Didn't either of you boys ever work Telamuk Point before?"

"No," the saxophone player said, "and I never want to again."

"I didn't ask you to sign a contract," the girl said. She smiled suddenly. "Don't be a grouch, Pat. This isn't a bad place up here. It's got something."

They left the highway and turned into a dirt road, full of chuck-holes, which ran between barb-wire fences down to the edge of the lake. The little dance hall stood on a spit of land with small waves lapping at it in the darkness. A single string of garish lights picked out the parking ground, the white-painted entrance, the ticket window with its spool of pink three-for-twenty-fives.

The hot-dog-and-coffee man was getting his oil stove started in the booth. The piano was dusty from standings there a week. The girl wondered if they had fixed the bass key that stuck. She ran down a series of descending ninth chords . . . No, it was still there.

The dance floor had an aisle on two sides; that took care of the traffic to the hot dog stand and back, and made some room for benches against the wall where girls who hadn't been asked to dance could sit. They were usually empty, though. Down in town a couple of girls might put on some

cool tailored things and stag it to a dance if they were there on a summer job and it came Saturday night and they didn't know anyone and decided to go out in safe twos or threes and get acquainted. But Telamuk was too far from town. A girl came out to Telamuk Point because she was with a fellow that was having a swell time and hated to let her go home, and that was the only reason.

Big Indian Joe took his place by the gate between the aisle and the dance floor, holding the rope loosely in his hands, his melancholy eyes roving in his broad brown face . . . It was the Chief very old and toothless and with a quick heart-breaking smile like a baby, that sold the tickets in the booth. But it was Big Joe who took them, at the edge of the floor, and it was Danny who hurried everywhere, dimming the lights for waltzes and driving the rattletrap car to town after wax for the floor, and going outside to get the sheriff if things got rough. It was Danny who had the best luck talking to the white people and it was Danny in whose heart the old bitterness was strongest, the bitterness about the young men of the tribe who would not learn the old songs and the stories any more, who would not raise good ponies and learn skill in the stick-game, but wanted to hang around town and go to the movies in checked pants and slicked-back hair.

"We always open to an empty house," the girl said. "If they drive up outside and don't hear music, they won't come in. Get set . . . let's go."

She began to beat out the first number and the saxophone picked up the melody, low and hot, good stuff. Thank God, she thought, I won't have to do all the work tonight; the guy is all right, he can play. There was never any time for rehearsals before you worked the Telamuk Point job; you didn't know how it was going to sound till you were in there, playing.

They gave two numbers to the empty floor and then a couple peered in nervously, danced one dance and fled. Nobody ever liked to be the first ones out on the floor. It was better when three boys and two girls from Henderson's ranch came in, clowning. They came to see if the crowd had arrived yet and decided to stay anyhow, and the extra man went and got the girl from the hot dog stand for a slow fox trot.

The floor began to fill. The cars sputtered outside and came to a stop, they backed and coughed trying to get into line in the parking lot, and the girls waited in the doorway or under the lights outside while the fellows parked the car and locked it and maybe scuffled a little out there in the dust for fun. The girls had on summer formals they had bought by mail, or white and pink and yellow sharkskin suits if they were summer people, or even slacks and sweaters. They waited for their escorts outside under the blazing lights, placidly. If you had given a fellow enough of a good time then he asked you to go up to Telamuk Point, after all the other places were closed, you had nothing to worry about.

The girl at the piano watched the circling faces, the clasped bodies on the floor. They were rapt, happy, moving in a dream. Whatever they had started out to do this night, they had done it and they had got along swell, they were bitter-ending it, trying to make it last. If they had started out

tonight to get drunk they were nicely oiled by now, they were right out on their feet, they were silly and happy and ga-ga and just managing to keep going. If they had been bursting to talk all during a lonely week, thinning apples and tending ditches, out there in the hot orchard squirming with unsaid things they had said them all to somebody tonight and felt better . . . You know, I voted for Roosevelt, but still I think . . . always had trouble with my stummick . . . d'jasee Joan Crawford where this young kid, you see, is her husband, and he's no good, and Spencer Tracy comes along . . . paid off my crop loan last fall, but didn't have nothing left to get a new grading machine.

If they were strangers in the valley, a little bit afraid of the encircling hills like you sometimes are on a summer night, if they had started out alone to have a coke down at the corner and see what they could see, they had somehow found a friend; hoping for nothing much, they had answered the joshing from the other end of the counter, been helpful when somebody blew out a tire, somebody had said Thanks, pal, why don't you come up to the Point with us. There had been somebody else's girl to dance with, probably, and the notion that if you stayed around, and could hold a job, and the folks were nice like this, you might get a girl of your own some time.

If they were out to make love, they had made it on a park bench down in Apple City under scattered trees back of the Library, or in a movie, elbow to elbow with fingers clasped; they had made it across little tables and under the bang and clash of the nickel music machine, in the tiny cabarets on the highway. There had been stops along the lake road where the pines were thickest, and "Darling, darling" and "oh, God" and a silence you could cut with a knife. There were eyes like stars now in the tired faces on the floor, and feet that dragged but kept on, and tremendous bursts of clapping after every dance.

"It's time for a waltz," the girl said. "We've got to play one every third number. For gosh-sake now, drag it. *Drag it*. Give 'em time. As Big Joe says, the ones that can't dance, they like to waltz."

The sax picked up *The One Rose That's Left in My Heart*, smoothly. The girl thought about a place in San Francisco where they were coming in now, at two and three in the morning, to catch the last floor show and have coffee royal at the little tables on the terraces. She thought of a spot in Hollywood where the costliest music in the world was falling like torn velvet, and a joint in South Los Angeles where a couple of soldiers were quarreling over a dame while the lights got bluer and the smell of frying oysters got thicker. She thought of a speakeasy in Chicago before that and a roof garden in St. Louis and a little funny place in Madison, Wisconsin, where the cast of the Little Play Shop met and beefed after the show.

"For the luvva Pete, we must sound worse than I thought," the sax player said. "What are you crying about, —am I that sour?"

"No," the girl said, "it's just because it's Saturday night tonight . . . Saturday night everywhere . . . I don't think you'd understand."



## THOMAS HOWELLS

### *Walking at Night*

*Under the cover of impellent rain,  
And threats of rotund thunder, I discern  
The steps of all who ever sought desire  
In the world of their wind-driven pains:  
As long as fountains flow and hopes return  
Back on themselves in their unchosen hour,  
They have unseeking what search would not attain,  
Who over the vision of momentary power  
Prefer to let the lamps of custom burn.*

### *Entreaty at a Point in Time*

*Need, belief, and ever-returning desire,  
Be present now, renew our eyes to see  
Earth, if old in wisdom, young in hope,  
Who from fatalities of our outward will  
Makes fuel to feed her and our inward fire;  
Let not our burden of your history  
Abase our vision of your ample scope,  
And memory of past excellences kill  
Excellent hope to which we yet aspire.*

### *Question of Some Hour*

*What is the life expectancy of stars?  
A soldier asked between the bombs one night;  
It was a question that astronomers  
Do well, perhaps to keep out of their sight.*

*He had one look, to bring the question forth,  
Then fell wherever roaring dynamite  
Can push a stubborn integer of earth.  
The bomb did not blow out his question, quite;*

*I see it glow, five thousand miles from there;  
And mindful of the worth of integers,  
I ask between the hopes that we prepare  
What is the life expectancy of stars?*

## *FRED HAMANN—Scarecrows De Luxe*

### I

*Clandestine  
blackbrew hour.*

*Pistol butt thud-a-thud  
on doorjamb.*

*Skirr of feet  
ruckling porchboards.*

*Crucifix calling card  
Torchlights frontyard.*

*Nightbrave nigger geese  
these self-made police.*

*Tarbrush daubers,  
feather swabbers.*

*Preacher clowns  
in blood-dotted gowns.*

*Henchmen, lynchmen,  
and political pinchmen.*

*A bedsheet masquerade  
in potvaliant crusade.*

### II

*Night crawlers creep,  
backwater deep.*

*Kerosene and slew dew,  
whiteman's voodoo.*

*Rope* *coil*

*Cracklebone creak,  
reek-sweat shriek.*

*Heil, knights of boo,  
midnight Who's Who.*

## E. H. EBY—"The Tragedy of Mind"\*

It is apparent that the work of Herman Melville has a special value for the contemporary writer. The latest evidence of this is the posthumous volume by William Ellery Sedgwick: *Herman Melville; The Tragedy of Mind*. While Mr. Sedgwick had no intention of doing an exhaustive study of Melville it is true that this more limited objective includes areas decisive to an understanding and proper evaluation of Herman Melville. In making his choice Mr. Sedgwick has avoided being sidetracked by trivial or irrelevant issues; in a sense he has considered what might be called final questions.

Equally admirable is the quality of Mr. Sedgwick's mind which makes the treatment of such questions as What is the meaning of life? What is the reason for the existence of evil? neither platitudinous nor dessicated. On the contrary there are qualities to Mr. Sedgwick's thinking which makes his work provocative and exciting to read. He can track down an idea at least as far as its second involution; his thought processes have intensity that is generated by his own emotional involvement in the issues at stake; and he has some understanding of contemporary problems.

Stripped of its complications and qualifications the thesis that Mr. Sedgwick wants to establish is that Herman Melville had a questing mind. Melville was in search of a faith which would satisfy his emotional needs and would at the same time fit the facts of his experience. Melville set upon this quest with all the intensity and honesty that a virile mind can possess. He refused all compromises, discarded all authority, stripped down to the last naked residue of his own mind. At the end of the process, coincident with the writing of *Pierre* he found himself facing chaos and eternal night. Then, according to Sedgwick, Melville began the slow process of reconstruction by taking a new tack. He resumed his fellowship with the main stream of humanity, he accepted the priority of the "issues of the heart", he realized the value of tradition as the thread connecting past, present and future, and became resigned to the fact that there are tragic issues in life whose explanation is wrapped in an impenetrable mystery.

Essentially this is a sound and adequate thesis but unfortunately Mr. Sedgwick has weakened the force of his book by a type of special pleading peculiar to a whole coterie of contemporary writers, and the fact that the author was unconscious of his casuistry in no way absolves him from the consequences. This casuistry begins from two apparently harmless assumptions and stops short where the final consequences would be visible even to the bewitched author. He arbitrarily chooses to label the first half of the Melvillian quest radical Protestantism.— Thus Sedgwick implies that the search ended in a defeat and frustration barely short of self-annihilation because of the inadequacies of the Protestant philosophy. By the same tech-

\*Harvard University Press, 1944, \$2.75.

nique but without such unequivocal assertions he suggests that Melville's rehabilitation was made possible through the rejection of Protestantism and an "inclination to Catholicism".

This method of using labels distorts the essential truth about Melville. The difficulties of Melville were the difficulties of much Nineteenth Century thought, but most certainly the issue of Catholicism versus Protestantism is not at the core of the matter. Melville started out with some of the most respectable instrumentalities of his period—the philosophical idealism and the individualism in which so many of his generation put their trust. One instance was his compatriot Emerson who set his optimism upon the premise that the material world was an end product of a divine mind or spirit. The world of nature studied in this light would reveal, he believed, the laws of its all-good creator. In *Moby Dick* the emphasis is on the realities of nature which Melville finds to be such that the intentions of its creator are suspect by any set of ethical principles that a man can respect. Emerson had a second resource when his first argument was challenged. The divine or spiritual element operated directly through man by mystical, intuitive or instinctive processes and gave, Emerson believed, ultimate truth. Melville examined this second promise in *Pierro* only to discover that out of the well of man's unconscious his bucket brought up such ambiguous and contradictory elements that the source itself must be unreliable or of dubious nature.

Thus Melville, who wanted to believe the tenets of his age, was compelled in all honesty to discard them because they were contradicted by the realities of his own experience. His test of these articles of the Nineteenth Century credo also revealed further fundamental weaknesses. The individualism of the century, combined with its philosophical idealism, created an almost inescapable drift to solipsism. It was this tendency which drove Emerson, Thoreau and many others besides Melville into a constant state of alarm lest the integrity of their minds might be compromised by some external influence. To protect the uniqueness of the self required unsleeping vigilance but to obtain the organization necessary for civilized society required nothing but the automatic operation of natural law.—Another weakness that often undermined their dearest intentions was their hostility to the industrial revolution and its twin brother science. As intellectuals and idealists they were inclined to sneer at "mere material advance."

Fortunately for Melville his nose was rubbed in the dirt of common experience. In the end he was unable to brush aside as insignificant and of no great consequence such things as a substantial meal a good drink and a fragrant cigar for had he not been a sailor bunked in the forecabin of a whaler, an inhabitant of the Liverpool slums and a guest in a Pacific island paradise? Even at the point where Melville came the nearest to final defeat—in that feeling of bitterness and isolation from his fellowmen because they had failed to understand or appreciate his meanings—even there the despair was never final. In the end there is evidence that Melville renewed his fellowship with mankind.

Whatever the failure it was not because of any radical Protestantism; whatever the reconciliation and recovery it was not because of Catholicism.



There is no need of further argument on this point, but if examples are needed those provided by two great contemporaries are immediately available. Both Tolstoy and Walt Whitman found solutions to these problems which are comparable to the answers provided by the later Melville and certainly their answers had nothing to do with Catholicism.

But even more serious is the failure of Sedgwick to follow their logical conclusions certain correlaries of his term, Catholicism. This acute and subtle critic, normally a relentless hound on the trail of an elusive quarry, suddenly quits cold. As an example, Sedgwick undertakes to define Melville's attitude toward the Civil War from the opinions expressed by Ungar, a character in the poem *Clarel*. Ungar, Sedgwick asserts, expressed the depth of Melville's thought—"The conviction that although directed against an evil the Civil War was itself an evil; it was a recrudescence of the same destroying zeal which had driven his ancestors out of England in the Seventeenth Century." Now Ungar was a Southerner and a Catholic whose ancestors had come to colonial Maryland to escape the "non-conformists' zeal or bite." He had fought for the Southern cause and after defeat became a voluntary exile from home and a most bitter and tortured man.—We find him in the story of *Clarel* as a hireling mercenary of the Turk. For a man so keen on significancies as Mr. Sedgwick is to miss or omit the interesting possibilities latent in these further facts about Ungar is in itself significant.

And even more insidious distortion is latent in this interpretation by Sedgwick; insidious precisely because it is never forthrightly expressed. It is that Melville was not in agreement with the Northern side in the Civil War, that he believed slavery a wrong but opposed the abolition movement because the effort to abolish slavery would itself cause another evil. Anyone familiar with Melville's Civil War poems knows that this is not the true position of Melville.

This gives a clue to some further intentions of Mr. Sedgwick. The culmination of his whole interpretation ends in the meanings found in Melville's last work *Billy Budd*. Captain Vere forces the hanging of Billy even though he knows that the young sailor is in a real sense innocent. Sedgwick agrees with Captain Vere's argument to the officers of the court-martial that the death penalty is a necessary conformity to the Articles of War which must be rigidly enforced in order to prevent a potential mutiny especially in such a perilous and disturbed time as the period following upon the French Revolution. Here we have a reverse situation to that of the Civil War argument. A man deliberately takes the life of a good boy in order to protect established institutions even though he knows that those institutions are the cause of grave iniquities. Sedgwick argues that Melville is fully in accord with this reasoning of Captain Vere. So, according to the interpreter, Melville now supports conduct which produces evil even though the act per-

formed is not done to right some wrong. Sedgwick finds sufficient justification for such conduct in the practical necessity to preserve the stability and continuity of established institutions. The glaring inconsistency between these two cases is never noticed by Mr. Sedgwick.

What has produced this casuistry? The latent motivation of Mr. Sedgwick is an urgent desire for certainty and security. He gets it by accepting the authority of established authority and the repudiation of any questioning or rebellion. He hides this from himself and the world under the label of Catholicism. Whether this is the essence of Catholicism does not have to be settled here. Nor is it necessary to decide whether this antithetical term Protestantism can be fully equated with rebellion against authority. What is necessary is that whole argument and its direction be brought into the full light of the day.

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## JOSEPH B. HARRISON—Postscript on “Literature and the Current Crisis”

Of the various dissenters who have commented on my essay, “Literature and the Current Crisis”, some, I think, have suspected me of an academic antagonism to modern literary trends and some, like Mr. Moskovitz of Philadelphia\*, have wondered what I was driving at.

I would like to assure the first group of these critics that I am intensely interested and I hope responsive, as they are, to literary as to other contemporary movements. What I was attempting to say in the essay, no doubt obscurely, is that recent literature has reflected, as it inevitably must, recent social and intellectual developments, and that the non-literary movements which literature parallels have in our time been in the direction of what I called the “atomizing” rather than the integrating of experience. This latter trend has doubtless been inescapable, a necessary interlude between the breaking up of old formulations which have been effectively challenged by scientific and other criticism and the shaping of new concepts and programs which must presently, though again temporarily, take their place.

It would, of course, be obscurantist to deny a creative function to such a transitional literature (in a sense, surely, all significant literature is transitional), and Joyce's description of the progressive enfranchisement of Stephen Dedalus, for example, uncovers the psychological and intellectual foundations upon which a succeeding generation must build; no great art is without its own affirmations—such for instance as the necessity of spiritual freedom—and Joyce's Stephen is more ready than are those who fear his rebellion to participate in the reconstruction of values which must ensue unless we perish. Indeed, Joyce seems to be approaching something like the classical synthesis as the basis for the good life, but unless I have misread him—admittedly a very easy thing to do—his major preoccupation has been with the destruction of the inhibitory prescriptions of the past.

All I sought to argue in my essay is that this transitional stage *is* a transitional stage and that we are approaching a moment—in both our aesthetic and our other affairs—when the integration of new values rather than the disintegration of old ones must be our main concern if we are to survive. In the meantime our recent literature has done its necessary task of giving us an emotive formal representation of what has been happening to us. If James Joyce and Marcel Proust had not come forward others would have had to do what they did—either that, or one great phase in our historical evolution would have gone unrecorded in art. But whoever goes on imitating Joyce or Proust will shortly become as un-contemporary as imitators

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\*Bernard Moskovitz is editor of *Matrix*.

of Wordsworth or Pope, who surely remain great though they are no longer usable models.

And now for two or three of Mr. Moskovitz's questions. He quotes me as saying that from Proust and Joyce, "a reader can learn a good deal more about what he is than what he ought to be," and asks who are the writers that tell us what we ought to be. Mr. Moskovitz seems to think that I want literature to consist of moral blue-prints rather than be representative art. Such is not my desire. But I think that many great writers—Sophocles, Dante, Shakespeare, Milton, Goethe, Hardy, Conrad, Ibsen, Shaw, Sherwood Anderson—have indicated what men ought to be in describing what they are. (When I read *Hamlet* and *Othello* together, I think I know that for Shakespeare men ought to be as imaginative but not as inhibited as Hamlet, as stalwart but not as naive as Othello, and to have the integrity of both.)

Mr. Moskovitz also asks how one may know the whole man without knowing his parts. I think there is nothing in my essay which implies that one can. But just as one can forget the parts in the whole, so can one forget the whole in the parts.

Finally Mr. Moskovitz asks what I meant by saying that "chiefly the trouble in literature has been the same as that in physics—the failure of the synthesis that will bring literature and physics together with each other and with further attempts at achieving a synoptic view of the world." Well, what I thought I meant is that just as our political system is poorly coordinated with our economic, and our education in general with the modern world, so is our science as yet only partially assimilated by our literature, our literature only distantly visible to our science. This statement need not be construed as a reproach any more than one would reproach the Tennessee Valley before its waters were organized under the T.V.A. One need not reproach a Tennessee Valley for needing the T.V.A. before it got it.

The last thing I want to establish is a reputation for academic intolerance of current or coming modes of artistic expression. But I do think that a cat can look at a king.









